

TESTIMONY FOR SB 221

Gina Wiest

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My name is Gina Wiest and I am the Executive Director of the Lewis & Clark Humane Society. I have 15 years of animal welfare experience. I have participated in several animal hoarding cases during this time.

My first hoarding case was 2 months after I began my job in 1998 and entailed 53 dogs having been collected by Fred Musil. Certainly by some of the current cases this was a pretty small amount of animals. Regardless of the number the impact on my shelter in just housing them was huge. We didn't have the room to keep them on sight so had to have a warehouse, kennels for separation, staff to run it, volunteers to help socialize, food, and utilities all the while continuing to operate the animal shelter. The animals were legally turned over to our shelter in 3 months time but that didn't alleviate the stress on resources for the next year as we continued to socialize and adopt the dogs out to loving homes. The price tag was close to \$70,000. We did get some money from our County and we relied on the good will of the Helena community to help sustain us but the majority of the funds were sucked out of our shelter budget. There was and is no line item in our budget for this.

Camp Collie followed. Montana shelters and volunteers rallied together to help the Shelby community take on close to 200 Collies. My shelter manager and I alternated going to Shelby, weekly, to assist local law enforcement and volunteers run the camp. This case was especially long and drawn out but the devotion to these dogs never wavered in the Shelby community. Eventually these dogs were moved to Great Falls. Now two communities were impacted by one case. Again there was no budget for this and the local government bore the costs.

Just recently, the 100 Husky's in Butte which evolved into almost 170 animals once the females had their litters. Butte animal control has distributed some of those animals to other shelters which now impacts those communities and animal control continues to try and place the remaining dogs into homes. They don't have a line item in their budget either to cover costs.

Besides the cost of taking on animal hoarding cases the frustration of seeing these people repeat the hoarding process again is overwhelming. Mr. Musil moved to Libby and started over and by the time animal control intervened he had already collected 27 dogs and Libby was forced to deal with the problem of disposition. The roots of hoarding behavior include delusional disorders, obsessive compulsive disorders, impulsive disorders, paranoia and they will repeat. Mental health is a serious component in hoarding.

In the process of working on these cases, I found that the common thread with each was the outrage that was felt by the community. People are angry that this can be allowed to happen and law enforcement and courts don't have the necessary tools to address or prosecute these hoarding cases.

Companion animal hoarding is a complicated issue. It presents serious problems on many levels, beginning with the helpless animal victims, and often kids who may be in the family, right down the line to impacting an entire community.

I encourage you to support SB 221!